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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6815
INFO RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA IMMEDIATE 4054
RUEHKB/AMEMBASSY BAKU IMMEDIATE 1852
RUEHKV/AMEMBASSY KYIV IMMEDIATE 0044
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW IMMEDIATE 8063
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE 0315
RUEHYE/AMEMBASSY YEREVAN IMMEDIATE 2103
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 001542

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STATE FOR EUR/CARC, OES/S AND EB/TPP/ABT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/07/2017

TAGS: [EAGR](#) [SENV](#) [PGOV](#) [TBIO](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: JUNE 27 UPDATE ON AFRICAN SWINE FEVER
OUTBREAK

REF: A. TBILISI 01364

[1](#)B. TBILISI 1329

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft, reason 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. As of June 26, over 42,000 pigs have died of African Swine Fever (ASF) in Georgia with an additional 4500 culled. First Deputy Minister of Agriculture Bakur Kvezereli confirmed to Econoff the GoG strategy of containment: quarantine affected areas, disinfect entrance points to ASF-free zones, and cull stray pigs, pigs immediately adjacent to affected areas, and surviving pigs of infected herds. GoG officials have not yet decided to cull the entire population of pigs - estimated to be over 550,000 before the outbreak. Only six areas have not yet reported infections. Post's Defense Threat Reduction Office (DTRO) is providing testing kits, although supplies are running short. Georgia is waiting to accept offers of help from other donors until after GoG officials - led by Prime Minister Noghaideli - decide on a path forward, which will be based on the results of an epidemiological investigation. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) As of June 26, over 42,000 pigs have died of African Swine Fever (ASF) in Georgia with an additional 4500 culled. An additional 600 pigs are dying from ASF each day - half of them culled. Regional and village officials throughout Georgia provide daily updates on the affected pigs to three dedicated 24/7 phone hotlines the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) established. Econoff visited the hotline center, which was staffed by five Ministry personnel keeping tallies on the affected pigs and areas.

Strategy: Protect uninfected areas

[1](#)3. (C) First Deputy Minister of Agriculture Bakur Kvezereli confirmed to Econoff the GoG strategy of containment: quarantine affected areas, disinfect entrance points to ASF-free zones, and cull stray pigs, pigs immediately adjacent to affected areas, and surviving pigs of infected herds. ASF first appeared in western Georgia in May - likely from mismanaged waste in Poti port. It has affected every region along the east-west corridor that divides Georgia, and is now in the eastern region of Kakheti. Only six areas have not yet reported an outbreak: Adjara, Samskhe-Javakheti, two municipalities in Kakheti, Kazbegi, and other extremely mountainous regions. GoG officials have not yet decided to

cull the entire population of pigs - estimated to be over 550,000. Even though the affected geographical area has grown larger, the rate of infection has not increased significantly. The MOA is working closely with the Ministry of Internal Affairs to limit the movement of pigs and infection, but it is not a true quarantine--only the roads into ASF-free zones are monitored. Nothing prevents pigs from wandering across the borders elsewhere. MOA officials suspect there might be two different ASF strains in Georgia, with one possibly originating from the feed. At Kvezereli's request, Post's DTRO officer agreed to find out if Georgia, through its DTRO-sponsored labs, has the capability to test for different strains. He also stressed the importance of using the labs' computerized programs in order to track the spread of ASF.

Damage control and assistance

¶4. (C) Kvezereli appeared confident that even the most remote farmers are aware of the problem, but he admitted in some areas, such as Kakheti in eastern Georgia and Guria in western Georgia, there is misinformation about how best to handle it. However, some progress is being made. He said that former Minister of Agriculture Mikheil "Mixo" Svimonishvili, currently the governor of Guria, is helping local farmers understand the severity of the problem, but that "one Mixo just isn't enough. We need more Mixos." Ministry officials estimate that upwards of 90 percent of the swine population in Guria - where ASF first appeared in early May - is affected with ASF. The high rate of infection in Guria coupled with Svimonishvili's efforts have convinced local farmers of the severity of the problem, but even in Guria there is not yet discussion of widespread culling.

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Kvezereli said farmers in Kakheti do not understand the severity of the problem yet, as they have not dealt with it for as long as those in Guria. Kvezereli appeared anxious to more thoroughly investigate the spread of ASF and its origin in order to better explain the problem to the public.

¶5. (C) Kvezereli said GEL 300,000 (approximately USD 177,000) is earmarked for the regions to use against ASF. Some donors have offered to help, but so far only the USG agency DTRO has been in a position to provide immediate assistance. DTRO supplied about 2200 reagents to test for ASF, but this is not enough to do the mass number of tests required if Georgia continues with its current strategy of containment. The kits are being used at a rate of about 20 a day, and only about 1000 remain. Post's DTRO officer will investigate the possibility of bringing in expert technical assistance to help Georgia develop and implement a mid-term strategy. Once the ASF problem passes, Kvezereli said the GoG - per Noghaideili's decision - is hopeful the GoG can use the ASF-free zones to repopulate pigs by distributing ASF-free piglets.

¶6. (C) Comment. ASF may be difficult to fully eradicate in Georgia. The government is focusing on preventing the spread of the disease into uninfected areas and wants to avoid having to eradicate the entire pig population of Georgia. Even a total cull of the country's domestic pig population would not assure success, because there are many wild swine in remote parts of Georgia and ASF reportedly can lie dormant for some time in ticks and be transmitted by them. It appears the GoG has a careful plan to deal with the problem initially, and a plan to repopulate once the problem passes. However, it is unclear what officials will do in the interim - where they will get more of the expensive reagents, what to do with the mass numbers of pig carcasses, and how they will continue the containment strategy for the requisite year to show there is no longer a problem. Post's DTRO office is working closely with MOA officials to assist where appropriate and when asked, and Post will report on the GoG strategy as it develops. End Comment.

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